

Imaging Mercy Today

Mercy—180 years, still at the edge?

Ngā mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy! With our penchant for round figures, 2011 promises to be a milestone year for Mercy, as we mark 180 years since the Congregation was founded and - on 11/11/11 - 170 years since Catherine McAuley died. A New Year message from Mercy International's director, Mary Reynolds rsm, notes that in those 180 years, more than 55,000 women have become professed Sisters of Mercy. Today, there are almost 10,000 Sisters serving in 46 countries around the world, with tens of thousands of lay women and men gathered alongside them as co-workers and associates.

Highlights expected this year include the launch of a keenly awaited definitive biography of Catherine McAuley, being completed by US Sister of Mercy and scholar Mary Sullivan rsm. Pilgrimages from Australia and New Zealand may see more of our own colleagues making the journey to Baggot Street, to find their spirits nourished by touching the places where Catherine lived and worked.

The real value of those links lies in their capacity to alert us to the cries for mercy that rise from our own place and time. To good effect, Mary Reynolds quotes another US Sister of Mercy and writer Joanna Regan, saying that if Catherine were alive today, 'instead of the cries of the poor children of Dublin haunting her dreams, the cries of a suffering world would have troubled her sleep.

'She would have turned her energy to global interrelationships of rich and poor, knowing that as long as in any country the poor, sick and uneducated are oppressed or marginalized, the light of the Gospel is dimmed, and peace and justice remain elusive ideals.'

In Auckland, our working year began with a pilgrimage to

Ponsonby by more than a dozen co-workers from two Mercy community development initiatives. Starting at the graves of Mother Cecilia Maher and several of her contemporaries who came here in 1850, the hikoī wound its way past Mercy Hospice and the bronze sculpture at the entrance to St Mary's Convent, spent time reflecting on Mercy's founding story and the spread of its ministries throughout Aotearoa, and ended with a visit to the historic chapel, blessed and opened by Bishop Pompallier in 1866. How the seeds planted by those intrepid Irish women have taken root and blossomed since they were first sown!

And the challenge that falls to us now is to see that Mercy continues to respond to the cries of those who live at the edge of our society, reflecting the divine discontent of the God whose mission we are all called to share. As visiting



MERCY TODAY: Teresa Anderson rsm (right) with representatives from Te Ukaipo and Te Waipuna Puawai, gathered for an orientation session at St Mary's Convent in Ponsonby last month. The historic kauri chapel was blessed by Bishop Pompallier in 1866.

Mercy in our shoes now

E Io Taketake—God, you endure in every age:
let our holding to traditions we cherish
not prevent your plans from unfolding
to meet the crises of our day.

Let our memory of what has been
open us to future possibilities,
and fire the imagination of those who join us
in seeking to transform our world.
May our founding stories
come to life once more
in the reality of our times.

May Catherine's original vision
and the spirit of our Mercy pioneers
inspire us today
not to do what they did then,
but to be where they would be
if they were here now,
standing in our shoes.

lecturer Fr Anthony Gittins has reminded us this month, at workshops in Christchurch and Auckland, the call is to the adventure of a lifetime, open to all who are willing to pay the cost 'of not less than everything.'

What's required is that we share the passion and action of our time, 'at the peril of being judged not to have lived,' says Fr Gittins, whose own work in more than 35 different countries includes a long commitment to disenfranchised, mostly homeless women in Chicago. 'There is no cheap grace,' he warns, 'but authentic discipleship is worth every cent of the cost.' A spirit of adventure is a prerequisite for those who respond, he insists.

Is it because so much of organized religion seems safe and self-serving that it does not attract risk-takers and trail-blazers from among youth today? Would a more courageous course draw more to follow Mercy's call? If we were seen more clearly to be at the edge, should we be judged more truly to have lived? How tall do we stand beside the Mercy pioneers who launched our waka? - Dennis Horton